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"Walt Whitman, an American, one the roughs, a kosmos": Identity and Naming in the Global World of Walt Whitman's Poetry

by

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Abstract

Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* most frequently characterized as an American work, was part of a larger project to represent the United States as a global society. The America Whitman writes of could be termed an American microcosm of the global community, as the world's people converge on American soil and contribute to its culture. The movement of society and people from East to West is often highlighted in his work, and the American spirit is regarded as the unifying spirit of the community, regardless of time or place. To demonstrate how Whitman "sees" the world through his American lens, this paper explores the function of naming in "Salut au Monde!" and "A Song of the Rolling Earth," two poems which seem to be in stark contrast, as Whitman catalogs the global community in "Salut au Monde!" and does not assign proper names to his subjects in "A Song of the Rolling Earth." Both poems include second-person addresses from the speaker to "whoever you are" and demonstrate Whitman's ability to forge intimate connections with his unseen audience through his poetry. The argument focuses on the impact of assigning names in Whitman's national and global poetic projects and makes the case that Whitman's appeal to his audience is centered around a call to "universal humanity" that allows community membership to all people, regardless of time, place, history, gender, or nationality.

In an 1860 review of *Leaves of Grass* entitled "Walt Whitman and His Critics," Whitman is depicted as a spiritual, all-powerful man, practically a force, who is allowed to speak through his poetry for everyone: "In a word WALT WHITMAN *represents the Kosmical man – he is the ADAMUS of the 19th century – not an Individual, but MANKIND.* As such, in celebrating himself, he proceeds to celebrate universal humanity in its attributes" ("Walt Whitman and His Critics"). As he is described here, Whitman reaches out to the world across the boundaries of time, space, and nation and realizes these long-distance relationships fully in the pages of *Leaves of Grass.* Whitman firmly plants himself as an American and an American poet, but the persona of "Walt Whitman"[1] in his poems calls out to the world both inside and outside of America's borders. For Whitman, the world exists in a smaller form on American soil, as the Americans, American products, and American cultures he sees, experiences, and describes in his work are the products of both national and international influences. To help the reader "see" "Walt Whitman's" America and celebrate his version of the American experience, *Leaves of Grass* uses the idea of America as a global microcosm to create an international poem and sense of community. *Leaves of Grass* celebrates a nation that brings the world together through the common needs, experiences, and sensations of being human. Whitman places himself at the center of a national, and by extension global, poetic space that is eager to celebrate universal humanity in the voice of an American poet.

[1] I will refer to the poetic character of "Walt Whitman" in quotations from hereon out because he is a poetic character and make the distinction between the poetic character and the poet himself.

The reader of Walt Whitman's poetry is immediately confronted with a presence larger than the reader or the poetry itself – the figure of "Walt Whitman" who speaks and is spoken to in *Leaves of Grass* and elsewhere. In every edition of *Leaves of Grass,* Whitman's voice resounds as he catalogs the world around him and sings of a national idea that extends to welcome a global community in the late nineteenth century and the future. The people, technologies, and cultures of the world as seen on American soil inform the poet about the shape of the nation as well as the character of the international sphere. Often, Whitman's poetry takes a broad view of the world, naming everyone in the world in densely-written sections of geographical leapfrogging to experience all the world's people, places, and sensations.

The poetry of *Leaves of Grass* often uses the people, places, technology, and experiences of America and Americans as substitutions for the larger global world. This move in *Leaves of Grass* signifies that America, for Whitman, has become a microcosmic representation of the global population and experience. Whitman does not need to describe or experience the world because he can see and experience the world in America and its cities – the world has come to the United States. America, especially its cities like New York, appears to be a site of global magnetism, drawing to itself the world's people, technology, and culture. This creates a sense that the world's diversity is being re-created on American soil and re-forming the American identity into something more unique and global.

At the center of the kaleidoscope of people, things, and places sits Whitman the poet and poetic persona, the absorber and arbiter of the words to describe both a new

America and a new global arena. To aid the reader in seeing, feeling, and understanding the world through his own experience and consciousness, Whitman often includes a character or speaker also known as "Walt Whitman" to act as translator and interpreter of his poetry. While it is unclear whether or not the "Walt Whitman" who experiences the world in *Leaves of Grass* is supposed to be Whitman himself, the idea of "Walt Whitman" as poetic arbiter of the national and global poetic experience is one that Whitman himself cultivated during the public and comprehensive promotion of *Leaves of Grass,* proclaiming himself in an early self-written review of *Leaves of Grass*, "An American bard at last!" ("Walt Whitman and His Poems, 1855). This poetic persona is central to the understanding of Whitman's poetry for several reasons, the first being that Whitman and the "Walt Whitman" who so frequently appears in the poetry are the reader's "eyes and ears" to the world of *Leaves of Grass.* He alone has the ability to recognize and name the different cultures and people he sees within America as well as their connections and relationships to the international population. It is for this reason that Whitman's poetry merits critical examination both when he chooses to identify the world's people and when he opts maintain the anonymity of his subjects – he knows the "language" of the human spirit, but Whitman uses the terms for people and places carefully and significantly. In this language, "American" takes on a new, more spiritual meaning and the term begins to imply a long-awaited point in global and human history. "American" becomes a sensibility that had been previously unattached to a name that is shared by like-minded and spirited people regardless of time and place.

As Whitman's claim is that his poetry is the poetry of America and the American people, the idea of "Walt Whitman" as the self-declared American bard situates him in a position of poetic authority and authenticates his American experience. This helps to authenticate his global experience in America and allows Whitman to describe the world through his experiences in America and American cities. While the reader is called to experience America and the world in Whitman's poetry, this sensory experience is often mediated by or filtered through the body of the poetic "Walt Whitman," making him the central point of the national and global experiences of Whitman's poetry. For the reader, this experience is translated through Whitman's control and use of words and poetic forms to his or her receptive senses. This sensory experience allows the work to become more global and inclusive – Whitman calls his reader to "sense" his meaning in *Leaves of Grass,* expanding his American audience and work into the larger international sphere

America the Poem

The names of people, places, and Walt Whitman himself pervade the pages of *Leaves of Grass,* from the early (1856) title of "Song on Myself," "Poem of Walt Whitman, an American," and range within the poems from loud, affirmative declarations of person, place, and thing to more subtle, internal namings and identifications done within in the lines of his poems. Regardless of the volume, Whitman's use of language to describe the national and, by extension, global, guides the reader through a highly controlled poetic experience that attempts to illustrate to the reader what Whitman is attempting to create and connect to in America and the world. The description of the global often naturally stems from the description of the national in Whitman's poetry

because Whitman describes the American people and experience using "originating" terms Whitman; more simply put, not everything the poet sees and describes in America is referred to as "American." While the diverse people become part of the whole, they retain their individual origins and are referred to as the French, the Spanish, the Germans, and many, many others. The globe is, in a sense, described on American soil and in her cities because the nationalities of the world exist within the nation and in plain sight of the poet.

Amid seemingly all-inclusive lists lie gaps, generalizations, and stereotypes of who and what are in the world giving the reader the sensation of Whitman's exuberant scrambling to include everyone and everything he sees in *Leaves of Grass.* As Whitman attempts to process and display the world, he glosses over much of the individuality of its parts and people. Fine distinctions are not a part of *Leaves of Grass,* unless they pertain to the specific sensations and observations of the speaker or poet himself. The tendency to generalize in an attempt to be inclusive stems organically from the energy of both the poet and the poem; it is as though the poet (or speaker's) exuberance for the America that he observes, feels, and reads about does not allow him to slow down and note the smaller characteristics and individualities of people and groups. Yet the poet is not too over-excited or over-enthused to lose sight of the uniqueness and difference among the people he calls the reader's attention to and the America he wants to express. Whitman's voice may at times be too general, but it is always used at full volume and remains insistent that his subject is special and deserving of notice, celebration, and praise.

Whitman's tendency to gloss while recognizing difference leads to several interesting tensions in *Leaves of Grass* and creates in Whitman's poetry a sense of an America that has energy and identity specific to its people. The America that Whitman depicts in *Leaves of Grass* occurs at what Whitman sees as an important and defining historical moment. Part of this feeling was prompted by the social, cultural, and governmental events that Whitman witnessed that appeared to bring the world to America. Edward S. Cutler argues in *Recovering the New: Transatlantic Roots of Modernism* that "Breaking both class and cultural barriers, the Crystal Palace as Whitman remembered it celebrated in a single vast gesture the combined production of the fine artists and labors across both time and space" (Cutler 144). The 1853 exhibition was frequently visited by Whitman, and critics have argued that the event helped to structure *Leaves of Grass:*

> The plan of Whitman's first book was in fact to 'make an exhibition,' according to Emory Holloway. Following the format of a nineteenth-century 'world exhibition,' Whitman's poetic analogue was to become 'a repository of all the heterogeneous displays his age and land afforded him.' Although the resulting first edition of *Leaves of Grass* is not overtly cast as an exhibition, its heterogeneous catalogues draw upon a technique of presentation common to the exhibition gallery and many poems directly trope upon the discourse surrounding the 1853 [Crystal Palace] exhibition. (135)

In addition to the majesty and larger-than-life exhibition, the visits of the Japanese ambassadors in 1860 helped to shape Whitman's consciousness of the international population and America as a site of global interaction. According to Gay Wilson Allen's *The Solitary Singer: A Critical Biography of Whitman*, the Japanese "ambassadors," or envoys, in Washington to discuss a treaty with the United States, created a national stir

that resulted in heavy newspaper coverage of their whereabouts and activities. Whitman witnessed the parade on Broadway held in the "ambassadors'" honor on June 16 that resulted in the poem that would eventually be titled "A Broadway Pageant."[2] Allen argues that in this poem "Whitman is less concerned with the Japanese envoys than the actual purpose of the trip than with the symbolism of the coming of the representatives of the Orient to the young Western nation...The circle is complete: past and present, East and West are now joined; their cultures and people mingle" (Allen 265-66). For Whitman, this visit signified "the final stage of 'manifest destiny,' refined and 'spiritualized' since Whitman's crude editorials in the 1840's, but no less unboundedly optimistic" (266). Aside from these more "spectacular" occurrences, Whitman's simple day-to-day observations that could be made on a New York City street corner helped to inform the idea of a diverse and possibly global America.

Due to the prevalence of these occasions "to see the world at home," Whitman insists on bringing to his reader's attention that America should revel in its diversity. The sense that no one chooses to notice or celebrate themselves, their country, or their world allows Whitman to step forward and call the reader's attention to the beauty of America and its role in the future and the world. While it is not expressly stated in *Leaves of Grass*, a sense of personal and national urgency shines through Whitman's work as though he is the first (and fears he is the only) person to note the uniqueness and opportunity of the moment at which the people of the world seem to be converging on common ground and within close proximity to each other; the world is coming to

[2] "A Broadway Pageant" was originally published in the June 17, 1860 edition of *The New York Times* as "The Errand Beaters." Whitman changed the poem's title after the Civil War (Allen 265).

America, and people and places no longer have to be read about or imagined, but can be seen, experienced, and interacted with. Yet, for all the uniqueness, readers are faced with a speaker and poet who sees and celebrates the diversity of the Spanish, the French, the Syrians and others in "Salut au Monde!" but only sees them "dance with castanets in the chestnut shade, to the rebeck and guitar" (26), hears their "fierce liberty songs" (27) or hears their "locusts...as they strike the grain and grass with the showers of terrible clouds" (30). Whitman's sight appears to translate in stereotypical terms, moving away from highlighting individual differences towards generalizing different nationalities to argue for the diversity of the nation. While these countries are noted, they are noted in common-knowledge terms that can both inform the world of the culture's existence and limit the knowledge about a people through the scope of the information. The reader of *Leaves of Grass* is challenged to sort out the problem of a poet who so exuberantly champions individuality using reductive and stereotypical descriptions of unique nations in his verse. The problems of why and how Whitman identifies America the way he does or why and how he gets to speak for America and the world become a challenge for the reader. This challenge is extremely complex for the reader who attempts to place Whitman and his poetry within a static and understandable context in order to make a definitive statement about Whitman's status of as a poet of not only America, but America the model global nation. As Whitman's poetry stresses fluidity and expansion, the reader who attempts to sort out where exactly the poet stands in the national and international spheres must also be flexible and willing to navigate the poetry and Whitman's all-inclusive poetic goal.

Whitman's reliance on standard characterizations of peoples and places leads the reader to wonder if the "global value" of his poetry lies in his ability to name and recognize the different cultures both in and outside of America or if this stereotyping diminishes the value of Whitman's seemingly global perspective. The reader is challenged with the question of whether or not Whitman's poetry has "global value," meaning that the poetry of *Leaves of Grass* makes a statement about America or its people that speaks to not only America as a nation, but to the world. In other words, while Whitman speaks about the American experience, *Leaves of Grass* may have "global value" if the poetry be used as a metaphor for the global experience – America can be the microcosm that speaks for the global macrocosm. The diversity of America and Americans that can be seen in Whitman's poetry may be able to make a statement about the nature of the world and the world's people, thus contributing to larger understandings between people and places.

While Whitman positions himself as the poet of America and *Leaves of Grass* as the quintessential "American poem," the America he describes within the "leaves" is full of people who have come from somewhere else and who symbolize a tie between the Old World and the New. In Whitman's poem, the America and the American about whom he speaks bring a sort of connectedness and acknowledgment of the relationship between America and the rest of the globe. The people of America, many of whom are natives, are also *not* natives in that many of their ancestors were born and raised elsewhere, and many characteristics of that Old World connection, from physical traits to customs, have been maintained by these American settlers and citizens and made a

part of the national culture. This international incorporation of both physical and cultural elements has formed the looks, behavior, and traditions of America in a way that is unique and globally representative. The exchange and transformation of ideas that are possible seems to erase the boundaries and borders between people in Whitman's poetry and allow for a seemingly borderless international community within the America of *Leaves of Grass.*

As the poetry and its argument could never remain as simple as that, the progressive idea of the erasure of national and international differences is challenged when one notes that Whitman's Americans, at the beginnings, middles and ends of every poem and throughout *Leaves of Grass* are always Americans in their hearts. When speaking of historical and national progress in "Passage to India,"[3] Whitman writes, "Lands found and nations born, thou born America, / For purpose vast, man's long probation fill'd, / Thou rondure of the world at last accomplish'd (78-80). As the poet begins in the East, he sees the culmination of history and national and human progress accomplished in the West, on American soil. History and the people of the past, present, and future, have moved themselves to this Western, culminating, American point. Country of origin does not seem to matter and it is only the present location and identity that seem to fit within Whitman's poetic paradigm. Does this mean, then, that Whitman feels that everyone is, at the most basic level, an American or does he mean that being American is the most important thing to be? The 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass* states

[3] From the 1891-1892 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman, Walt. *Leaves and Grass and Other Writings*. Ed. Michael Moon. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002.

that "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature" (Whitman 616). It seems that Whitman gives himself and his thinking away most when he claims that Americans are from all nations and are timeless. While he is tied to an American place and identity, he claims that this should not limit others across multiple boundaries to also claim an American identity. Also, those who seem to share Whitman's "poetical nature" seem to have an American status that pre-exists the settlement and establishment of the nation. Maybe it is simply that the unique makeup of America is the inevitable outcome of the course of history; maybe Americans were just waiting to get to the location and find the name they were seeking all along. When Whitman reference to "the Americans of all nations at any time on the earth" seems to imply that the sense of being American long preceded the name, and that the name "American" now encompasses these senses of poetry and nationality (616).

The era in which Whitman composed and revised *Leaves of Grass* was one of rapid industrial and scientific progress, as inventions such as the telegraph and railroads made the world smaller for its citizens by providing means of global communication and trans-national mobility, increasing the pool of knowledge about America and the world outside its boundaries. In addition to the changes occurring in the national sphere, during the early composition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman was spending nearly all of his days in New York, meeting and socializing with people from every profession, social class, and a wide range of nationalities.[4] In New York, Whitman was able to find on a smaller scale the broad range of people and the "America" of diversity and progress that

[4] See Cutler, Edward S. *Recovering the New: Transatlantic Roots of Modernism*. Lebanon, New Hampshire: UP of New England, 2003.

he could sense happening on the national and international levels. In "City of Ships" from *Drum Taps,*[5] Whitman writes of the

> City of the world! (for all races are here,
> All the lands of the earth make contributions here;)
> City of the sea! city of hurried and glittering tides!
> City whose gleeful tides continually rush or recede, whirling in and out
> with eddies and foam! (4-7)

The tidal patterns of the "City of Ships" are similar to the progress and people who "make contributions" and gather in America. In an otherwise ominous poem that speaks to the ferocity of the ships and war, Whitman also discusses the American "city of the world" in which the world has convened to form a new type of city. According to Anthony Giddens, "Globalisation can be thus defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens 63-64). The availability of new science, new products, and new knowledge creates in Whitman's poetry a sense of an expanding world which is becoming increasingly inter-involved despite physical distances between people and places. The increasing ease of travel, communication, and both economic and cultural exchange begin to create a borderless international sensibility and awareness for both the poet and reader of *Leaves of Grass.* The historical moment of international possibility and awareness is captured in Whitman's poetry and continues to describe the possibilities of global exchange. By "global exchange," I mean that Whitman's poetry indicates a possibility for global

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[5] Whitman, Walt. *Leaves and Grass and Other Writings.* Ed. Michael Moon. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002.

interaction and change that is evidenced by Whitman's observations of the technological development of the nineteenth century and the growing diversity of the American population. *Leaves of Grass'* structure and subject matter argue that "old" boundaries, divisions, and borders are becoming obsolete and that isolationism is impossible when the people and ideas of the world are aware of one another. I argue that in response to the trends of modernity and the expanding realization of cultural diversity in the nineteenth century, Whitman employs his strong poetic persona in *Leaves of Grass* to construct American and global identities. These identities require diversity, as America becomes the larger "City of Ships" to which the tides constantly bring the people of the world allowing the people of America to have an understanding of what it means to live in such a fluid and interconnected international climate. Whitman creates "Walt Whitman" in his poetry to both celebrate and instruct his readership, creating the first and most idealized poetic version of the American and global citizen. Whitman attempts his poetic project by giving voice to the American nation and the world by naming the world's people, accentuating common humanity, and attempting to create a sense of interconnectedness between Walt Whitman and the readers in not only in America in the nineteenth-century, but everywhere, regardless of time and place. Whitman's sense of interconnectedness to all people, places, things, and times allows *Leaves of Grass* to describe an international community that is described by and tended to by the mind and affection of the poet. With borders erased and differences noted and celebrated, the poet and his poetry are able to connect once disparate and conflicting groups under a communal sense of transcendence, universality, and diversity.

Whitman deals poetically with the influx of knowledge and people in his American and international views through the use of "catalogs" in several poems in *Leaves of Grass.* These "catalogs" are long, comprehensive lists of people and places that Whitman sees as vital entities in the world of the nineteenth century. These catalogs, while wide-ranging in scope and somewhat cumbersome in length, have energy and seem at times to be transcriptions of Whitman's sensory overloads as he observes and experiences nineteenth-century America. In poems such as "Song of Myself," "Salut au Monde!," and "Song of the Exposition," Whitman's lists of the different people, places, and things of the world seem excitedly compiled and enthusiastically inclusive of everything and everyone that the poet sees, knows of, or wishes to experience. These lists seem to be randomly compiled; there is no sense of diplomatic or strategic ordering in the way Whitman names people and places. He appears not to be worried about negative associations, cultural prejudices, or aligning certain cultures or people in a manner that would privilege one over another. The lists simply exist in their frantic and organic states. The energy and enthusiasm that is communicated in these lists adds to the poetic persona of "Walt Whitman" by demonstrating that America is a nation worthy of celebration and poetry and casts him even more firmly in the role of the prophet of the global age, an era where the poet can see the possibilities in all the resources and assets the world has to offer and loudly proclaims them to willing and interested ears.

The increasingly modern age brought to Whitman's attention increased experiences and stimulation both at home and abroad. The international exchanges and

global possibilities of this time most likely struck Whitman as similar to his theories about the future and the world. It is as though the cataloging in *Leaves of Grass* is, in part, an historical record of what could have been the early stages of a global microcosm in America, or at least, the idea of a global America. The energy that lies behind the notation of difference is one fueled by a desire to include and absorb what the world has to offer, not an energy that is directed towards stopping the flow of culture, ideas, and people. In his essay "'Hinting' and 'Reminding': The Rhetoric of Performative Embodiment in *Leaves of Grass*", Vincent Bertolini offers a critical approach to Whitman's cataloging:

> Whitman's political attitudes have been hailed as a precursor of modern multiculturalism...In the catalogs of persons, Whitman describes the American body politic by particularizing types of subjects according to their material and embodied attributes, such as race, gender, class, profession, ethnicity, or regional origin. This poetic technique formally levels the subjects represented in a way that suggests a radically egalitarian view of American citizenship. (1052)

Whitman describes an America of equality and exchange that does not exist – at least, not yet. What *Leaves of Grass* and Walt Whitman offer is a *vision* of the America that is possible if the right voice proclaims it and those who receive it take it to heart and practice the "celebration" of global America.

Whitman creates a poetic America that allows for equal opportunity and an equal stake in the nation to be possible and to be realized even if it is only in theory and in poetry. *Leaves of Grass* becomes Whitman's poetically successful version of the American "stew" metaphor – the diverse elements of the population retain their individuality but become complimentary parts of the larger American matrix. When one

looks at examples where Whitman describes Africans, Asians, Germans, Belgians, and all the other people of the world as "Americans," one is able to see this most clearly illustrated – these people retain what makes them individual and global, and which also speaks to their individual histories while simultaneously assuming a new, collective, and diverse American identity. Whitman's scheme is not that of the either-or for Americans – they are both in his poetry. This idea of respectful blending can then be expanded to a global sensibility and dynamic, allowing for the harmony and coexistence of all who are included in Whitman's catalogs, both on and outside American soil. Roots to the Old World and the past are connected to the New World through both the people who have brought themselves and their traditions from the Old World to the New and through the catalogs Whitman makes when he observes their presences and describes a diverse American experience.

What is problematic about Whitman's enthusiasm in naming and listing the human entities that compose America is that this positive erasure of difference can become dangerous and seemingly reductive both in terms of cultural awareness and historical accuracy. Whitman's America of *Leaves of Grass* is one that could be, but it does not exist at that historical moment; the potential for equal opportunity and an equal share in America for all is only within the leaves of *Leaves of Grass*, and the history that he catalogs is that of his own theorizing about America's potential as a global civilization. While Whitman claims that all the representatives of all the people of the world are currently living in the United States, *Leaves of Grass* does very little to show how they are or could live together. Representation in *Leaves of Grass* seems to imply

cooperation, but in real-life, there needs to be a widespread catalyst for harmony, exchange, and diversity. Bertolini helps to shed light on the problems inherent in Whitman's idealistic cataloging and communication of America when he notes:

> Whitman's catalogs...open themselves up to a critique on consensualist grounds: that by syntactically serializing subjects in this way, Whitman suppresses the real relations of dominance and subordination that obtain among them in the historical world. But Whitman has been claimed for multiculturalism on account not only of his representations of a diverse embodied citizenry, but because of his lyric technique. (1052)

Whitman's catalogs ignore both local and international power structures that impede the America and the American cataloged in *Leaves of Grass* to exist or thrive. Whitman's poetry and equal mentions of cultures and people implies equality among the citizens of America and ignores internal prejudices of people within the nation. While all parties are named equally by Whitman, they are not treated equally in America and they do not treat each other equally. While Whitman's society is harmonious, the real people of America carry with them both Old and New World prejudices that disallow them to blend peacefully and fully respect each other's origins and futures. In addition, the history of the United States does not allow equal participation of all the members of the society, further impeding Whitman's ideal America from being realized. The problem arises for the reader that he or she must wonder if Whitman's naming of the people of America and the world according to their Old World ties limits their power by tying them to these words and their connotations in his poetic universe. However, this reminder of the Old World and the global population may give the marginalized a voice via Whitman to speak in the America that is becoming rapidly becoming a diverse, global microcosm.

The seeming ignorance of historical and current power dynamics in Whitman's poetry could serve to reinforce the power and social status quo, allowing for the interpretation that these power dynamics and inequities are part of the America that is and should be celebrated. Since *Leaves of Grass* appears to imply equality but not demand it, the reader is stuck with the puzzle of whether or not Whitman perceives that social change needs to occur or if he is content with relations as they stand from his nineteenth century point of view. By simply noticing people but not really studying or comparing their daily lives and social realities, the poetry has the potential to lock them into oppressive or incomplete power relations with the rest of the nation. Whitman refuses to advance a concrete political agenda in the naming, cataloging, and organization of the world's parts in his poetry, making the possibilities for reading Whitman's descriptions of the world's people and critiquing his selections of highlighted persons as diverse and varied as all the information he attempts to include in his poetic celebration. Whitman's poetry isn't about the governments of men and women and their real-life effects on people's lives; *Leaves of Grass* is more about the spirituality of being human than the governmental and social mechanisms of American daily life.

Power in Poems

In contrast to the many poems that catalog the world and attempt to place concrete labels on people, places, and things such as "Salut au Monde!," "Song of the Exposition," and "The Sleepers," Whitman also includes in *Leaves of Grass* poems such as "Unnamed Lands" and "A Song of the Rolling Earth" in which the proper names of people and places are left unwritten or "unsung." In these poems, the opposite tension arises when Whitman addresses a more general audience (i.e. the entire literate and

spiritual worlds), keeps a lower poetic profile, and is abstract in his description of the world. The questions that arise from this situation lead the reader to wonder if in these poems Whitman is creating a global atmosphere by ignoring or glossing over the differences between people and places in these poems. If Whitman is simply talking about "people" or "people in America" in a general and abstract sense, the criticism of his ignoring real-life oppression and power structures tends to become less prevalent. The reader may agree that yes, the world that Whitman literally describes does not acknowledge color, race, or gender issues, but his vision is one where these issues do not matter because of the omission of identifying details. Whitman himself acknowledges that his poetry will have gaps and omissions, but that his poetry reaches out to all in "Salut au Monde!," "And you each and everywhere whom I specify not, but include just the same!" (193). More simply put, although he does not acknowledge oppression does not mean he's unaware – it could mean that he's envisioning a world where oppression does not exist and where these differences have been erased or rendered unimportant. The scope of Whitman's poetic exploration of the world and his project of naming and including the world's people in his poetry is vast and inevitably imperfect, but it is not intended to be exclusionary. Rather, the community welcomes both the named and unnamed with equal amounts of enthusiasm.

One must wonder if by not naming and placing everyone and everyplace on the same level Whitman is attempting to create a more global, egalitarian universe or is simply dismissing the differences among people and places that form uniqueness and individuality. This argument could be extended to say that the poetry is about human

nature or a transcendent American humanity or identity that Whitman is sensing and announcing to the international population. If by leaving names out of these poems, Whitman is avoiding the tendency of readers and people in general to stereotype other countries or peoples based on what is assumed about them by the connotations attached to the language of their names, then his poetry may be an attempt to create a truly color-blind and multicultural world. Basically, Whitman is avoiding stereotyping people by forcing them to make stereotypical connotative associations between nationalities and personalities. The omission of names avoids the cognitive leap to place all the stereotypical characteristics of nationality on a person and forces the reader to see him or her as only a person. It follows, then, that the omission of names allows for the omissions of both power structures and history, making the poetry seemingly asocial and timeless, which may be exactly where the poet who "makes the present spot the passage from what was to what shall be" and who feels unbound by time, space, history, and society wants to lead the American reader of *Leaves of Grass*.

To Name or Not to Name...

Whitman's poetry invites interpretive difficulty and debate when naming and the refusal to name become central issues. For example, if Whitman's omission of the names of people and places in poems such as "Unnamed Lands" or "A Song of the Rolling Earth" is simply because remarking upon their verbal identities detracts in some way from the focus on Walt Whitman the American poet, then the lack of naming in these poems becomes dismissive and self-serving. This, of course, seems to be one of the many poetic diversions, directions, and interpretations Whitman the poet and voice wants to turn the reader's head and mind towards in the poem, simply to jerk it back into

the global in the next poem. Confusion and the need to linger in critical thought over the word and stylistic choices of *Leaves of Grass* are vital to the nature of the work. Since Whitman's poetry allows so many interpretations of his world and self-views, the reader is constantly forced and encourage to struggle with the complex problem of sorting out Whitman's national and global representations.

The cooperative national and global representations, where the national reflects the global, are seen most clearly when Whitman does identify the composite parts of America and celebrate the diversity at home; however, it can also be interpreted as manifest or obscured in the poems when he eschews names and focuses on humanity. When Whitman positions America as the definitive site of global mixing and shows how the world population has gathered as Americans, Whitman makes America a global community that becomes hard to critically reconcile with his other poems, poetic devices, history, and society. Whitman seems to best account for this intellectual difficulty of his poetry in "Song of Myself" when he acknowledges that he may be difficult for readers to sort out: "You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, / But I shall be good health to you nonetheless" (1341-1342). These lines, however, include the caveat that "I shall be good health to you nonetheless," drawing the reader's attention to the fact that he or she would benefit from the critical struggle of attempting to parse the poet's identity. For this reason, and to further improve the "good health" of his reader Whitman encourages the readers of "Song of Myself" and *Leaves of Grass* to continue attempting to sort out his agenda:

> Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
> Missing me once place search another.

I stop somewhere waiting for you. (1344-1346)

In essence, whether he names or does not name people or places in his poetry, Whitman's stance on the national and the global seem to be left open to the reader's interpretation. This idea of multiplicity of interpretation or flexibility in meaning makes the poetry itself globally symbolic; Whitman promotes his work, but refuses to interpret the poetry, allowing to *Leaves of Grass* to be received by and communicate with a wider range of people. By bringing a loud voice to the poetry Whitman makes a statement to the world, but by encouraging the reader to try to understand him (even if this requires multiple readings and visitations of the text) he refuses to be prescriptive. Whitman calls out to his reader to invite him or her to the text, but he refuses to force a message into his or her lap that he or she is either able or ready to join Whitman's America, which by extension, is his call to join Whitman's global community. Multiple readings and interpretations bring the less immediately open to Whitman's community into the fold as he or she is able to sort out the subtleties and complexities of membership in Whitman's national and global communities. In a sense, it may be possible to read Whitman's poetry as having globalism built in as a poetic device.

Whitman, (Inter)national Poetic Guide

Compounded with the problem of naming, individuality, and stereotyping in Whitman's poetry is the "Walt Whitman" who speaks and who addresses both himself the reader. This figure within the poems of *Leaves of Grass*, who has the same name as the author, is ambiguous about his relationship to his creator. Many read the "Walt Whitman" in Whitman's poetry as the poet himself, but I would argue that this person is

a character of sorts, based on Whitman's personality, but more of a persona Whitman employs to advance his ideas of America and American poetry. This is not an egotistical move – the "Walt Whitman" of *Leaves of Grass* serves a rhetorical purpose throughout the volume of poetry and helps to centralize the ideas of America, the poet, and poetry using his physical and spiritual beings as filters for the reading public. "Walt Whitman" is the reader's (and I would argue the nation and the world's) guide through Whitman's poetry and vision.

While "Walt Whitman" can sometimes be a peripheral figure of *Leaves of Grass,* there are several instances where his presence cannot be ignored or discounted by the reader as insignificant and poetically egotistical. It is in these moments that one is forced to realize that *Leaves of Grass* and the reader's experience in this volume are closely tied to the reader's experience of "Walt Whitman" and his sensory experiences. For the purposes of this paper, I will discuss this stylistic quality of Whitman's poetry first in "Salut au Monde!" and later in "A Song of the Rolling Earth,"[6] which I feel to share several similar stylistic qualities of Whitman's national and global poetry, but which also offer interesting contrasts between the messages of Whitman's poetry when he identifies the world's people by name and when he chooses to maintain the anonymity of his subject. Both poems have the same lifespan in terms of *Leaves of Grass;* while both originally appeared with different titles, they had both been a part of

[6] Unless otherwise noted, for line and textual references for "Salut Au Monde" and "A Song of the Rolling Earth," I will refer to the 1891-1892 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass and other Writings*. Ed. Michael Moon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002.

Whitman's work for the same period of time, having their first print incarnations in the 1856 edition.[7]

The uniqueness of a contrast between these two poems is that on the surface they appear to be thematic and stylistic opposites. While "Salut au Monde!" is a perfect instance of the cataloging and naming of both "Walt Whitman" and the people of the world, "A Song of the Rolling Earth" is a prime example of Whitman's omission of names and places in order to make a statement about either humanity or a global individual. While these are important elements in how the poems are read and critiqued, what goes unnoticed is that the poems share similar stylistic addresses of "Whoever you are!" from "Walt Whitman" to the reader and comment on the American and global human in a manner that is similar in intent though different in execution. "Salut au Monde!" and "A Song of the Rolling Earth" are different in form, but Whitman makes the identical move in both poems by breaking from form and turning the address of the poem outward to the reader. I would argue that these two poems demonstrate quite effectively the deceptively simple execution of Walt Whitman's poetry and his national and global commentaries while being oddly layered and open to multiple and varied interpretations. More specifically, these poems lend themselves to superficial interpretations of either an inclusive globalism or an exclusive nationalism within Whitman's poetry. While "Salut au Monde!" and "A Song of the Rolling Earth" can be read as both "expansive" and "sensual" poems where the speaker attempts to celebrate,

[7] "Salut au Monde!" first appeared in the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, in 1856, as "Poem of Salutation" and was given its current title in 1860 (Moon 117). "A Song of the Rolling Earth" was also included in the 1856 *Leaves of Grass* as "Poem to the Sayers of The Words of the Earth." The poem does not appear as "A Song of the Rolling Earth" until the 1881edition of *Leaves of Grass* (184).

experience, possess, and describe as much territory and humanity as possible, I believe this reading can (and must) be taken further to examine where, when, and who Whitman is attempting to reach, celebrate, and enclose, and to what ends, such as forging national and international communities, he is attempting to do so.

Whitman's Authority in the Sensory World

The more "traditional" or "characteristic" naming, self-referential, and expansive poetic style of *Leaves of Grass* appears in "Salut au Monde!" "Salut au Monde!" begins with the direct address, "O take my hand Walt Whitman!"(1), followed by what the speaker and "Walt Whitman" will see together: "Such gliding wonders! such sights and sounds! / Such join'd unended links, each hook'd to the next, / Each answering all, each sharing the earth with all" (2-4). These opening lines create a sense of excitement, wonder, and spectacle that sets the tone for the rest of the poem. Who is speaking to "Walt Whitman" is unclear, but it may be assumed that it is Whitman himself making this address. As he urges himself to take in what he can see and hear around him by taking the hand that is offered, Whitman creates a sense of community among the things and people he will experience – "Each answering all, each sharing the earth with all" (4). The pleasures "Walt Whitman" is commanded to experience and celebrate are diverse but of the same world and same land. It is through his experience that "Walt Whitman" will bring these things, people, and places into himself, his poetry, and his readers.

This early self-address within the poem creates a model for the rest of "Sault au Monde!," beginning with the second stanza, which asks, "What widens within you Walt Whitman?" (5). "Walt Whitman" is entreated by the speaker to take account of the

physical territories he contains, the "waves and soils excluding" (6), the "climes" and "persons and cities" (7), the "rivers," "forests and fruits" (11), and is asked "what are the mountains call'd that rise so high in the mists?" (12), "what myriads of dwellings are they fill'd with dwellers?" (13). This inventory of sorts creates a picture of an all-knowing and all-inclusive "Walt Whitman" who not only knows the physical attributes of the land he has experienced and is called upon to describe, but who knows the names of these things as well as the names and numbers of the people and their homes that lie in and on these territories. The figure "Walt Whitman" has been elevated to the level of omniscience and supreme authority with the address of these questions. As the speaker continues to ask "Walt Whitman" "What do you hear Walt Whitman?," (22) and "What do you see Walt Whitman?" (41), the poet answers his own questions about his worldly experience and endows himself with an authoritative knowledge of the world. Rhetorically, this allows "Walt Whitman" to assume the authority he needs to speak of the world and its people and persuade his reader to see it through his eyes, hear it through his ears, and feel the world through his skin.

These questions help Whitman, through the use of the apostrophe, to create a sense of dialogue and inclusiveness in his poem, even if that dialogue is one-sided. "Walt Whitman" could be a code name for "everyman" within the pages of *Leaves of Grass;* however, this seems to be a simplistic description of Whitman's use of poetic devices and his poetic voice as well as the overarching argument of *Leaves of Grass.* The poet is placed in both the position of the speaker and the addressee of the poem, centering the focus on himself and having total control over the globe which he both

experiences and absorbs. Thus, the poem is centered exactly where Whitman needs it in order to make his argument and establish the national and global communities of his poetry. By calling to himself, Whitman controls both the questions and their answers, leading the reader to see the world through borrowed eyes and forges a connection with Whitman that can be transferred to the reader through this filtered sight and experience.

The apostrophic questions and answers set up various tensions for both the speaker of "Salut au Monde!" and the reader. First, one is asked to determine if someone is speaking to Whitman or if Whitman is speaking to himself. And, if someone is speaking to Whitman, who might that voice be? Is it a human voice? Is it acceptable to think that it is a spiritual voice questioning Walt Whitman to see if he is fit to be the poetic prophet of America? The poem leaves these questions unanswered and each answer creates an entirely new set of tensions for the interpretation of "Salut au Monde!" Regardless, if we chose to read the poem with Whitman as the speaker to both himself and his audience, his rhetorical pose becomes quite complex and interesting. This "quizzing" or "self-cataloging" of sorts seems to both demonstrate knowledge of the people who "Walt Whitman" sees, experiences, and writes and proves his fitness to speak for these parties. This self-test mode demonstrates that the cataloging and naming of people and places has come after an extensive learning process about the people of the world. This learning process, however, is decidedly (and I would argue, aggressively) informal and completely experiential. The knowledge of the world that "Walt Whitman" is being tested about cannot be learned in a textbook or classroom and must be seen, heard, and felt. The education is a continuous process; as "Walt Whitman" questioned

about what sensory input he has received and from whom he has received it, Whitman is stressing the importance of learning and experiencing the beauty of the diversity in America and understanding that it is becoming a microcosmic representation of the globe, as "Asia, Africa, Europe, are to the east – America is provided for in the west" (15). As the world moves west, Whitman and America sit at the point that is aware of the east and ready to absorb what the world brings.

Whitman's Anonymous Intimacy

In the poems of *Leaves of Grass* where the name "Walt Whitman" is conspicuously absent the reader is still faced with a first-person speaker who prompts the reader to assume Walt Whitman is speaking, but that he has assumed that their relationship and identities as poet, speaker, and reader are understood.[8] There is intimacy in this move; Whitman makes the assumption that the reader will identify his voice and he also expects that he and his unseen, unmet reader will be thinking and interpreting the identity of the voice similarly. In *Leaves of Grass,* Whitman's technique and identified and unidentified addresses to his reader create an interesting relationship between the speaker and reader in terms of both parties' poetic identities. While the reader and poet have most likely never met, and may never meet, each knows the "sound" of the other's voice. This is most obviously demonstrated when Whitman does not identify himself to his reader – he doesn't need to – and less obviously when we

[8] I state that Whitman's name is "conspicuously absent" from these works as the reader and general reading population is so very accustomed to the literary persona of "Walt Whitman." In my view, when the name "Walt Whitman" is absent from a poem, it seems to draw more attention to the poetic form and the voice of the speaker as one attempts to sort out why Whitman did not simply repeat his own pattern of calling himself by name. It seems that this omission sets a tone for the poem that prompts the reader to look for the significance in what is missing as well as what is being said.

consider why Whitman is speaking in the first place. If this is a dialogue of sorts, he has been invoked by someone who has a connection to Whitman and *Leaves of Grass* through the act of reading the poetry and has indirectly "asked" Whitman to speak to him or her. Vincent Bertolini notes that Whitman

> [invites] the reader [...] to see the self gaining expression in the poetry as "being realized" – being instantiated, rendered real, brought into being – through the reader's participatory agency. As Whitman's speaker slyly suggests, this self compounded of both speaker and reader, as much the abstract "you" [...] as the lyric persona himself, possesses a body, one that can be excited, awakened, stirred to action, and the "realization" of the poet "depends" in some sense on his poetry's ability to stimulate such bodily responses. (1048)

Whitman assumes that both he and his reader are united by his poetry. The logic behind the voice, style, and poetics of *Leaves of Grass* is implicit and understood because both the speaker and the reader have spiritually fused in the poetic experience. "Walt Whitman" is allowed to speak for the reader because in that moment, he *is* the reader and the reader is allowed to use his "I" for his or her own voice because it is his or her voice. As seen in "The Sleepers," as Whitman's soul moves about at night and allows him to become one with the varied subjects of his poetry, "I go from bedside to bedside, I sleep close with the other sleepers each in turn, / I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers, / And I become the other dreamers" (29-31). Whitman is able to understand and incorporate himself and others into his unconscious experience and share in the unconscious, unguarded moments of others, creating a true spiritual community between Whitman and the people he sees and writes about. Just as the boundaries between countries may be seemingly erased in *Leaves of Grass*, so are the boundaries

between individuals; the physicality of people no longer matters, and it is only the spirit that remains and unites the two.

Of course, Whitman's assumption of the exchange of spirits of sorts between himself and his reader could be seen as simply compounding the generalizations in his poetry. While he claims "And what I assume, you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to be as good belongs to you" in "Song of Myself," the implication is that the reader and Walt Whitman would both want to share the experience and would be able to achieve symbiosis in the poetry (2-3). Again, this ignores the individual, defining differences of history, gender, experience, class, intelligence, and so on that would make the reading and life experiences between the poet and the reader different as well as create resistance to a peaceful and collaborative experience of America, the world, and *Leaves of Grass*. While "Walt Whitman" reaches out to humanity and assumes their experiences as his in *Leaves of Grass*, it is a poetic leap of faith on Whitman's part when he claims that the reader reaches back and accepts the gesture. In his version of an ideal poetic nation that could serve as a model for an ideal global community, however, the reader gladly and willingly partakes in this reaching out, which adds to the celebration and exuberance that surrounds the "new" nation of old nations.

That intimacy can be achieved by so many and so different people across such distant spaces and backgrounds through the words of the American poet is precisely the argument and project of *Leaves of Grass*. Of course, the catalogs introduce the problem of proper names of the peoples of other cultures and the individuality and global nature of the poetic persona of *Leaves of Grass* makes one wonder how truly global this poetry

is and how much of the world Walt Whitman allows and how much he dismisses in his poetry. While the names demonstrate awareness, the question of whether or not they demonstrate preference, or even prejudice, remains. As Whitman reaches out to his readers, one can assume that he means *all* readers, but again, since he neither claims nor denies this, one can never be sure if he is or is not selective in his gesture. I would argue, however, that the evidence of the poems that do not contain catalogs or proper names of any sort, and that deal with the limiting qualities of words support the argument that Whitman's national and international communities strive to include all peoples and places despite the inevitable stereotypes and omissions.

The Limitations of Language: Feeling America and the World

The descriptive problem in *Leaves of Grass* appears to arise from the difficulties for the poet due to the insufficiency of words to communicate all experiences and feelings accurately. Though a lover of words and a verbose poet, Whitman's verse often expounds upon the idea that the language available to all humans is neither sufficiently comprehensive nor representative for the sentiments he is attempting to portray. This accounts for the language that appears reductive, the language and circumstances that seem to be omitted, and what appears to be an optimistic ignorance of historical conditions. Whitman is not ignorant of these tensions and problems critics have noted in this poetry; in fact, by writing poems about how words cannot fully explain the sensory experiences of humans or humanity in general he faces these criticisms head-on and demonstrates the problems of assigning language to these ideas and real-life issues. The problems of inutterability and the shortcomings of language become dominant themes in

Leaves of Grass, and in the continued exchange between poet and reader Whitman calls on his readers to employ their powers of intuition in grasping his meanings when his words fall short. Reading Whitman "correctly" demands a distinct, but obviously undescribed, spirituality and intellect that "knows" the poet, mankind, and the world. This is a challenge to the reader's to sense things beyond the normal limits of language.

The call to "sense" the interpretation of *Leaves of Grass* is Whitman's means of transforming his American work into a truly global and inclusive body of poems. The influence and presence of diverse cultures in America help define the national character Whitman describes in *Leaves of Grass;* the reader's sensation that his poetry communicates on a global level exists because non-Americans locate themselves in the global microcosm that is forming in America. While those who live outside of America cannot literally and physically place themselves *in* America, Whitman displays in his poems and catalogs people in America who represent the global population. Figuratively, then, those people are *in* America as well, even if only spiritually. Where Whitman's language becomes stereotypical or poetically limiting or where it is simply abstract, the urging of readers to simply "feel" his meanings allows Whitman the poetic space to say that he truly does transcend the limits of borders and the written word. Abstractions or stereotypes are means of poetically normalizing the American and global experiences or may serve to speed up national and global identifications with the poetry. While Whitman may be unable to find sufficient words to define all the people, places, things, experiences, struggles, and identities of the world in *Leaves of Grass,* Whitman is able to bring all readers into his poem through quick inclusions and identifications.

"Salut au Monde!" is one of Whitman's most comprehensive and enthusiastic celebrations of the global population and human life both in America and abroad. The French title of the poem makes it obvious to the reader that Whitman will be exercising his ability to see outside of America's boundaries. This use of language is an obvious clue to the argument and message of the poem. The title signifies that there is an awareness of the French language within the borders of the United States; languages, customs, and commodities previously associated with the Old World are now common in the New, and the New World's presence is being felt in the Old. It is not uncommon for an American poet like Whitman who does not specifically claim French nationality or ancestry and who writes in English to use a French phrase. The title presupposes a climate of cultural and linguistic exchange and positions this as a normal poetic convention for an American poet. Whitman is using "future-perfect" logic – he is showing his reader what will seem normal and commonplace before the convention and normalcy actually exist. While the audience most likely understands the titular phrase "Salut au Monde!," Whitman assumes that this understanding will become even more commonplace and cease to be an understanding and become a part of the American culture. In a sense, global languages will assimilate into the American global microcosm and become useful and commonly used parts of the national discourse.

The most significant element of the title of "Salut au Monde!" is the international and cultural exchange that appears to be happening between Whitman and the world. I argue that this is a cultural exchange simply because language is an element of culture, and Whitman appears to be demonstrating knowledge of another language other than his

native tongue. In addition, this title is an exchange in that his salut/salute is a welcome to the world that also encourages a response. Originally published as "Poem of Salutation," the title greets the world in both intent and language by not simply being expressed in English. Michael Moon[9] writes in a footnote to the poem that Whitman "undertook to express a world vision...that tempered and balanced his nationalism" and that his revisions reflect this goal (117). Moon specifically notes the 1860 addition of "the effective salutation of the closing four lines" and the 1881 deletion "with discrimination" of lines that described the United States in order to "limit his point of view outward from America to other lands" (117). As the greeting is friendly, and directed to the world in a language that could be understood by international parties, Whitman is asking the world to answer his salute with equal enthusiasm.

Within the body of the poem itself, Whitman does much work to create the illusion of a population larger than one. While the reader is fully aware that Walt Whitman is the poet of "Salut au Monde!" and "Walt Whitman" is the main character of the majority of the poem and that "Walt Whitman" is most likely the speaker of the poem, there are moments when these voices take on multiple dimensions and seem more numerous than they really are. The voice changes in the poem, especially where "Walt Whitman" is addressed and then answers, seem to create a multitude of voices speaking among the listings of multitudes of people. While we might assume that it is the same person's voice throughout, Whitman's global experience and knowledge of lands and cultures outside of his national borders allows him to speak in many voices. This creates

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[9] Moon references Erkkila, Betsy. *Whitman Among the French*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.

a sense of connection between the speaker and reader, regardless of physical location; Walt Whitman can reach anyone on the globe because his poetry and his voice can take on many forms.

This sense of an internationally intelligible and connective voice continues in the references to physical sensations and connections in the addresses to "Walt Whitman" in "Salut au Monde!" By employing his sense of touch by taking the speaker's hand, sound by answering the question of what he hears in the world, and sight by playing a poetic game of "I Spy," "Salut au Monde!" becomes a full-body global experience for the speaker and the reader of the poem. Looking again at the review of *Leaves of Grass*, "Walt Whitman and His Critics," Whitman's global sensibility originates in his recognition of universal humanity. By referring to him as "*the ADAMUS of the 19th century – not an individual, but MANKIND,*" the reviewer has placed Whitman as both the original and symbolic referent of humanity. Not only has Whitman begun a new idea of humanity by becoming its Adamus, he has also lost his individuality and is able to encompass and understand all humans. His borders have been erased and he is beyond the man-made boundaries that would separate him from his readers and the people of the world. By turning this poem and the whole of *Leaves of Grass* into a sensory experience, Whitman is able to discuss the condition of all humanity through the senses. While *Leaves of Grass* quite obviously employs sight through its nature, Whitman's need to mention sound, smell, and touch in "Salut au Monde!" reminds the reader of other instances in the collection when the poet attempts to unite his audience through the common condition of having a physical body and experiencing physical

sensation. By taking this poetic turn, it does not matter *what* it's like to be a human within a specific national, political, cultural, or social context, but *how* one is human is what is of central and global importance.

Aside from being an interaction between individuals in the world, "Salut au Monde!" is an interactive experience between Walt Whitman and the population of the world. In section 4 of "Salut au Monde!" the speaker asks "What do you see Walt Whitman? / Who are they you salute, and that one after another salute you?" (41-42) allowing "Walt Whitman" the opportunity to share the poetic limelight with a global population that he can see in microcosmic form on American soil, which provides him with global knowledge. In return, Whitman expects the people of the world to see him – the vision of both parties is clear and distance is not a factor in the ability to see others clearly. Whitman is obviously describing sensory experiences that are not simply limited to human capacities – the global sight and exchange of welcome are both physical and spiritual. Whitman can be seen not only as extending his voice in welcome to the globe but also his soul in greeting. This exchange of salutary behavior continues to the end of the poem, when Walt Whitman the speaker positions himself as the American ambassador to the world:

> Toward you all, in America's name,
> I raise high the perpendicular hand, I make the signal,
> To remain after me in sight forever,
> For all the haunts and homes of me. (223-226)

Throughout the poem, Walt Whitman and the world have mutual respect for each other; he is recognized as an important American, and he recognizes the importance of the people outside of America with his salute.

While immensely encouraging and a brazenly romantic view of international relations, the mutual salute of Walt Whitman and the citizens of the world begs the question of why Walt Whitman, an "everyman" American poet has elected himself as a humanitarian and poetic ambassador to the world. According to Whitman in the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass,* this is the natural role of the poet: "Of all nations the United States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets and will doubtless have the greatest and use them the greatest. Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall. Of all mankind the great poet is the equable man...He is the arbiter of the diverse and he is the key" (619-20). Great poems and poetry exist for everyone, everywhere: "A great poem is for ages and ages common and for all degrees and complexions and all departments and for all sects and for a woman as much as a man and a man as much as a woman" (634). Poetry is the only means to cross national borders and extend the community of humanity beyond the limits, prejudices, and restrictions of governments. This goal cannot be accomplished by formal institutions or even on the material plane. Whitman claims, "A live nation can always cut a deep mark and have the best authority the cheapest...namely from its own soul" and that the "genius" of the country lies not in "its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors...but always most in the common people" (617). While Whitman speaks of the United States in these lines, the "common people" who make up the "live nation" are those who reflect the global population and who are cataloged as part of America in Whitman's poems. In order to have a truly universal and global community only the

poet can transcend difference and speak to the world because only he or she can fully understand humanity at its most basic level and find words to make others understand. Whitman's claims refer to his earlier point that "The Americans of all nations at any time on the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem...Here is not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations" (616). The American poet is most qualified to accomplish this task because he or she has had more experience with the people of the world – the nature and composition of American society is so unique that it is only the poet of the people, who has also experienced the people, can speak to the world and acknowledge the mutual specialness and destiny of humanity. Peter J. Bellis views the final lines of "Salut au Monde!" as Whitman's move towards "poetic privilege" in which he assigns himself the position of the mediator between the reader and the world (105). Even though the exchange between Whitman and the Old World only occurs poetically and the reader does not hear the Old World's response, the self-positioning of Whitman is legitimated and authorized throughout *Leaves of Grass* through the fictional dialogue and mutual salute.

What stands out to the critical reader of this poem is that Whitman's salute to the Old World (and the assumed acceptance of this gesture) occurs in the wake of his briefly cataloging the global experience using generalized and standard imagery to describe the varied peoples of the world. For example, in section 3 of "Salut au Monde!," which is dedicated to sound, Walt Whitman says:

> I hear the Spanish dance with castanets in the chestnut shade, to the rebeck and guitar,

I hear continual echoes from the Thames,
I hear fierce French liberty songs,
I hear of the Italian boat-sculler the musical recitative of old poems,
I hear the locusts in Syria as they strike the grain and grass with the showers of their terrible clouds,
I hear the Coptic refrain toward sundown, pensively falling on the breast of the black venerable mother the Nile. (26-31)

These, among other people, images, and places that Whitman sees, hears, and feels, are somewhat stereotypical portrayals of the peoples of the world. By associating with these people and what is indigenous to them and their lands, the knowledge of the world becomes somewhat closed and exclusive in this poem. The demonstration of the American understanding of global cultures comes into question here as differences and struggles are glossed and only the stereotypical and nostalgic ideas of the various European, African, and Asian cultures are accentuated. The depiction of the world is not grounded in a historical context, and the descriptions Whitman chooses of the people and their lands are stylized and seem to express a timelessness that does not correspond to reality. While "Salut au Monde!" does celebrate the uniqueness and individuality of the people of the world by naming them and making associations with their nationalities, Whitman's verse also serves to limit the knowledge about these people by reducing the poetic exploration of their individuality to one line. American knowledge of the world is demonstrated as a "flash-card" knowledge in which easy associations and trite factoids stand in for in-depth descriptions and demonstrations of understanding. As Whitman continues to hyperactively flit around the globe, the reader is privileged with an acknowledgement of the varied peoples and places in the world, but he or she is also

given the condensed version of all the societies that compose American society and that have preceded the country that Whitman inhabits and celebrates.

The Poet in the World

Whitman makes an inclusive poetic shift in "Salut au Monde!" in section 11 when the speaker makes a direct address to the reader: "You whoever you are!" (163). The apostrophe of the earlier sections of the poem that called out to "Walt Whitman" now calls to the reader, and in the same manner "Walt Whitman" is brought into the poetic dialogue, the reader cannot escape the voice that commands its attention. After addressing the "You whoever you are!" (163), Whitman makes sure that the people of the world know that this "whoever you are" is them, by again naming nationalities and countries in his apostrophe:

> You daughter or son of England!
> You of the mighty Slavic tribes and empires! you Russ in Russia!
> You dim-descended, black, divine-soul'd African, large, fine-headed, nobly-form'd, superbly destin'd on equal terms with me! (164-166)

This address becomes increasingly specific and focused on the people of the world as Whitman strives to make it clear that the "You whoever you are!" (163) is directed to all the people of the world. Interestingly, in these three lines, Whitman manages to address the inhabitants of three different continents – Europe, Asia, and Africa – from America, a fourth, revealing some of the logic of his poetic argument. Whitman means to include all the people of the world, and he starts moving across the globe with equal time and pace as he begins his address to these people.

While launched in "Salut au Monde!" on a global scale, the technique of opening a dialogue between speaker and reader is typical of Whitman's poetry and serves the

important function of forging connections between the two unknown parties. Peter Coviello describes this tendency of Whitman to break the poetic fourth wall as follows: "we are offered the strange pleasure of being solicited by an author who, while admitting he does not and cannot 'know' any of us, nevertheless pledges himself as an intimate companion, bosom comrade, and secret lover" (86). Not only does Whitman assume knowledge of his reader and larger audience, but he assumes intimacy; again, it is as though the physical boundaries that exist between reader and poet are erased or broken down. In "Salut au Monde!" Whitman even reinforces Coviello's argument by claiming that "I have look'd for equals and lovers and found them ready for me in all lands, / I think some divine rapport has equalized me with them" (213-214). The speaker (and maybe the poet himself) is desirous of an intimate connection that extends beyond just a simple dialogue.

The experience of the poetry becomes a conversation of minds and like spirits through the mutual engagement of poet and reader of *Leaves of Grass*. "You whoever you are!" is anyone who attempts to read, feel, and understand the poetry, and this "you" can be anyone, as it is not couched with any qualifications for readership. This mutual engagement of spirits and minds through poetry creates intimacy both on the interpersonal and international levels in *Leaves of Grass*. The address is not simply to just greet others, but to create lasting bonds across distances that could not otherwise be forged by such a diverse readership. Through Whitman's open and excited address, "Salut au Monde!" becomes globally interactive, as Whitman continues to call the population of the world to listen to his poetry and hear his salute:

You Norwegian! Swede! Dane! Icelander! you Prussian!
You Spaniard of Spain! you Portuguese!
You Frenchwoman and Frenchman of France!
You Belge! you liberty-lover of the Netherland! (you stock whence I myself have descended;) (167-170)

While these lines indicate a global call to be a part of Walt Whitman's poetic community and an opportunity to join in a project of equality and celebration, especially when Whitman claims that the "daughter or son of England," "the mighty Slavic tribes," the "Russ in Russia," and "divine soul'd African" and maybe also the reader are "on equal terms with me!" Everyone Whitman names is invited to join him on equal footing, yet the mechanics of this equality outside of a poetic statement are unknown.

These same lines can be used to support a reading of Whitman as reductive and ignorant of the power structures he has internalized and seeks to either obscure or ignore in his poetry. These lines can first be read as somewhat reductive in the way they view the people of the world because they do not offer a real means to either equality or understanding on an international level. In fact, while he mentions that the African is "on equal terms with me" (166), the African and other non-Europeans are not on equal footing within the poem or the catalog itself. Of the catalog contained in Section 11 of "Salut au Monde!," the address to the world is fairly comprehensive, but the European seems to be privileged by receiving Whitman's address first. In Whitman's defense, "All you continentals of Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, indifferent of place!" are spoken to, but the reader cannot help to notice that the Europeans are more closely identified with and spoken to with more familiarity (190). When the address branches outside the European continent, the address becomes more general, more based on folk

knowledge, and often more centered on religious affiliations such as Judaism and Islam,[10] while Christianity is not mentioned in the Western addressees. This seems to reveal a limited scope of knowledge about the people of the world as well as minimalizes the experiences of traditionally non-Western peoples.

Outside of Whitman's seemingly genuine enthusiasm and celebration of humanity, a deeper level on which a global connection can be made does not appear to exist; this seems to be a one-way dialogue of acknowledgement, but not understanding. While Whitman calls all to be a part of his salute (and urges all to return the salute), it seems that he cannot help but privilege his own descent as well as somewhat stereotype the heritages of others in his attempts to include all in a compressed space. After all, Whitman is the only voice and representative of a nationality that is allowed to speak in the poem and the only one that the reader receives; others are described by his terms and are given instructions as to how to respond. The reader is brought into what appears to be a global dialogue that is really Walt Whitman's monologue on what the world is made of.

The choice of the combination of catalog and apostrophe as the dominant poetic forms of "Salut au Monde!" further compresses the information and limits the ability of anyone other than Whitman to speak; he is speaking louder and faster than the world can respond to him. His voice resounds and calls to others who are not, at that moment, calling to him. The apostrophe is used to include the world as well as get its attention –

[10] "You Jew journeying in your old age through every risk to stand once on Syrian ground! / You other Jews waiting in all lands for your Messiah!" (182-183). "You foot-worn pilgrim welcoming the far-away sparkle of the minarets of Mecca! (185).

Whitman has begun the dialogue. The form of the catalog is so compressed and compact that once Whitman has captured the attention of his global audience, he has moved somewhere else; meaning that he ultimately controls what is said about the people of the world. Yet, for all this criticism, Whitman's own poetry seems to argue that he does not want the control or the blame for having left people out of his catalog – he wants timeless and harmonic connections despite his poetry's flaws. His intent does not seem to be to make distinctions, stereotypes or omissions: "And you each and everywhere whom I specify not, but include just the same! / Health to you! good will to you all, from me and America sent!" (193-194). While the address is from Whitman and America, this still seems to be an attempt to create international intimacy and connections between the New World of many nationalities and the Old World. Whitman seems to understand the flaws of his catalog and address; these lines say to the world that even if one is not expressly *in* the poem, he or she is in the poem, because the poem was meant to be read by and speak to all, even "All you of centuries hence when you listen to me!" (192). Whitman even wants to cross the borders of time – he is confident that despite his flaws, future generations of the globe will read and understand his poetry, creating intimacy that can only be purely spiritual.

Despite what appears to be a reductive and limiting global perspective as Whitman attempts to jam-pack "Salut au Monde!" with all the world's people, in the second-person call to the world, Whitman opens up the global space to all the world's people to answer him. The intimacy that Whitman constructs and appears to force forges a tie between the poet and reader regardless of whether everyone is a willing

participant. Near the end of "Salut au Monde!" Whitman acknowledges that all the world's peoples have a place in the global community:

> Each of us is inevitable,
> Each of us is limitless – each of us with his or her right upon the earth,
> Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,
> Each of us here as divinely as any is here. (195-198)

These lines complicate Whitman's poem by stripping away all that makes everyone in the world and America different and acknowledging a universal, legitimate claim to the earth through the shared condition of humanity. In this moment, he truly is the "kosmical man" who "celebrates universal humanity" because he bestows equal ownership of the world and human experience to his readers from his privileged position as the American poet. While Whitman's position is self-appointed, the authority with which he has bestowed himself is one that equalizes, proving his claim that "the great poet is the equable man" (619-20). These lines speak about everyone and seem to transcend the differences Whitman has previously noted and cataloged. These lines provide a justification of the cataloging; much like the Renaissance promises of poets to immortalize their beloveds in verse, these lines seem to promise a global humanity that is composed of the elements of the catalog. Whitman has given everyone a right to express his or her humanity and culture in his poetry and in his global understanding. His role as "an American bard" allows him to make claims that his poetry will live on combined with his outright denial of the limitations of time provide justification for the claim that everyone within *Leaves of Grass* will outlive and overcome the divisions that may occur in the non-poetic world. These lines are also a continued attempt to make up for what could be seen as Whitman "typecasting" his poem with a set of stock global

figures and explain why it was done for a greater good. The "limitless[ness]" of humanity directly reflects upon the limitedness of language and the poet and makes the reader aware that there is more to the poem than what is explicitly said.

Interestingly, in these lines addressed to "Whoever you are!" Whitman has no idea to whom in the world he is speaking. He addresses strangers, not intimates, and calls them to listen to his words and participate in his poem. Whitman encourages the readers of the world to be intimate with him; to transcend the limits of location and culture and join him in *Leaves of Grass*. In this, he builds a community that exists within the pages of his book and encourages multiple relationships between the poet and the speaker through multiple reading experiences, as can be seen in the final lines of "Song of Myself:"

> You shall hardly know who I am or what I mean,
> But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
> And filter and fibre your blood.
>
> Failing to fetch my at first keep encouraged,
> Missing me one place search another,
> I stop somewhere waiting for you. (1341-1346)

The relationship between poet and reader will be mysterious yet beneficial; so beneficial and intimate, in fact, that the poet and the poetry will become a part of the reader's blood and circulate through his or her system, regardless of whom he or she is or where he or she is from. These lines from "Song of Myself" indicate that this relationship will not be static; the poet will remain present throughout the work eternally and he invites visitations, re-readings, and different understandings of whom and what he is. This can be seen in Whitman's relationship to his work – the constant editorial changes made to

the poetry indicate that neither the poetry nor the poet will remain in its current form indefinitely and neither can the reader's relationship to the poet and the work.

Just as the work is never complete and always changing, so is the reader's relationship to all the elements of *Leaves of Grass*. Because the work itself is fluid, the reader's relationship can be as well. Whitman's poetry invites the reader, any reader, at any time, into a space that one would normally reserve for intimates and creates connections that transcend physical boundaries of all sorts. According to Coviello, it is through this technique that Whitman forges connections with his audience and constructs his ideal national microcosmic identity:

> For Whitman, nationality consists not in legal compulsion or geographical happenstance but in the specifically affective attachments that somehow tie together people who have never seen one another, who live in different climates, come from different cultures, and harbor wildly different needs and aspirations. To be properly American is thus, as Whitman conceives it, to feel oneself related in a quite intimate way to a world of people not proximate or even known. (87)

In this way, although Whitman's speaker addresses the entire world when he makes his salute and calls to "Whoever you are!," he becomes the demonstration of American nationality by personally calling to people who are unknown across borders and perceived differences. He sees the American a member of a globally representative nation, a connected entity, even if this connectedness is not tangible or understood. Whitman may not know who he is connected to, but he is connected nonetheless. So are those who read, understand, and share his poetry. Much in the same way America physically consists of peoples of all different counties of origin, so does Whitman's poetic microcosmic nation construct itself through his open, intimate address. By calling

the people of the world to him and attempting to meet them on a level that is simultaneously anonymous and intimate, Whitman attempts to create an American identity and further the processes that built it in the first place. As America is a complex mix of native and immigrant peoples, this American identity is closely tied to a globally representative identity in Whitman's poetry. The physical reality of the presences of the people he describes on American soil allows his poetry to have a third dimension bolsters his argument that the society and harmony he describes can exist in America and the world. If America can represent the world through its population and its people can co-exist harmoniously, then the example set by the microcosm can translate into macrocosmic relations, forging ties between Americans and people all over the world. The people of the world can be intimate if they are willing to call out to one another and celebrate the global the same fashion Whitman is demonstrating on the national level within the globally representative "nation of nations" (Whitman 616).

In the final section of "Salut au Monde!" Whitman continues the movement towards making the world an egalitarian global space by bringing the poetic voice back to the first person and recounting his own world-wide experience. This passage seems to be a time for the speaker, endowed with the authority of poetry, to reflect upon his sensory experiences and convey what he has learned from them to his readership. In the end Whitman takes on the role of "poetic arbiter" of the global experience of his poetry; it is ultimately controlled and encouraged by his words and poetry. Again, this reinforces Whitman's claim that the poet is "the arbiter of the diverse and he is they key" (620). As in "Song of Myself," what the poet assumes, the reader shall also assume;

translated to "Salut au Monde!", what "Walt Whitman" has seen, heard, felt, touched, experienced in the world will have to be the reader's experience as well. He both controls and processes the world, acting as the authoritative proxy for the reader. The poem begins its conclusion by summarizing "Walt Whitman's" journey:

> My spirit has pass'd in compassion and determination around the whole earth,
> I have look'd for equals and lovers and found them ready for me in all lands,
> I think some divine rapport has equalized me with them. (212-214)

In these lines Whitman not only sees himself as the true site of global equality, but also the divinely-ordained universal equal. He has synthesized the global experience of the poem in himself in order to show how the truly global person can come to fruition through the poetry. Whitman has demonstrated his own qualification for a "great poet" who "has less a marked style and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself" (624). Whitman has willed himself to spread out across the globe on a journey that is spiritual and attached to emotions – there is no hard logic that drives his project, and the collection of data has not been the goal of the journey. This devotion to feeling and "passion" for the world has allowed the poet to lose the ties in the world that would allow him a sense of privilege or cause him to rely on man-made hierarchies to judge himself and others. Because "Walt Whitman" has undertaken the project of saluting the world with his human nature and emotions as his most valuable tools, he has allowed himself to connect with the peoples of the world on the same human and spiritual levels.

There is a full trajectory of the American and global poet in "Salut au Monde!" that can be seen through the experience of "Walt Whitman" throughout the poem and his growth as a poetic character. The poem's changes in voice provide great insight into how the poetic experience will be translated and transmitted to the audience of *Leaves of Grass* so that they may "see" the world correctly. At the beginning of "Salut au Monde!" "Walt Whitman" is quizzed about and demonstrates his knowledge of the sensations and people of the world, allowing him to build his authority as an experiential human being and poetic guide. Through the use of the apostrophe to the world and the reader, all are called to join "Walt Whitman" and look at what he is displaying for both America and the world. At the end of the poem, the project is complete and "Walt Whitman" internalizes and expresses the world in "Salut au Monde!" This allows him to speak for and about the world and confidently address them with the line, "*Salut au monde!*" (219). This poetic move seems to be one of either supreme egotism or supreme idealism. It may be a mixture of both.

I would argue that these lines are the expression of how Whitman feels that the American identity must be created in the New World. It is quite possible that he is reasserting the argument from the preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* that "The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people. To him other continents arrive as contributions...he gives them reception for their sake and his own sake. His spirit responds to his country's spirit" (Whitman 618). Whitman, and other American poets, is a site of international reception and synthesis. This relationship between the poet and

the world is beneficial – both the world and the poet gain something from their interaction, and the poet is able to translate this benefit into a unique, American, and possibly globally representative context. Whitman continues with in his description that "The messages of great poets to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, Only then can you understand us, We are no better than you, What we enclose you enclose, What we enjoy you may enjoy" and that "The American bard shall delineate no class of persons nor one or two out of the strata of interests nor love most nor truth most nor the soul most nor the body most...and not be for the eastern states more than the western or the northern states more than the southern" (625-26). In the new national and global contexts, is only the poet, the average man or woman of heightened sensibilities and understanding who is able to express the unique and changing world. And it is only the poet who is unprejudiced in his celebration and expression of the world and the nation. As governments and boundaries are transcended by technology and a desire to experience the world, it is the spirituality and art of poetry and the poet who can lead the reader to understanding and harmony. "Walt Whitman," then, becomes the poet who Whitman often describes and honors simply by realizing that the world that erases or transcends borders is the one that can only be described and understood by the poet.

The World as a Sensory Experience

While the salute to the people of the world in "Salut au Monde!" allows "Walt Whitman" to become the poetic authority of the international sphere through the demonstration of his knowledge of the specific people of the world, the poem itself indicates that there is another element to being a part of the global community that does

not involve simple catalogs, salutes, and addresses. When Whitman notes in "Salut au Monde!" that there are inevitable omissions in his catalog, but that everyone is and should feel included in his poem, he is also addressing the unique problem of the insufficiency of words and the impossibility of fully describing the human experience. In contrast to "Salut au Monde!" in "A Song of the Rolling Earth" Whitman chooses not to cite specific countries or people, resulting in another set of global tensions and concerns from the omission of names and the lack of identifying words. This poem seems to celebrate the natural world, including humans, without stressing the words that seem to divide or identify the human parts of nature. In fact, the poem seems to stress that there are problems with words, especially names. In this poem, Whitman brings the speaker and the natural world together in his opening address:

> A song of the rolling earth, and of words according,
> Were you thinking that those were the words, those upright lines? those curves, angles, dots?
> No, those are not the words, the substantial words are in the ground and sea,
> They are in the air, they are in you. (1-4)

Whitman's first move in discrediting the authority of words is to undermine their composition – words are "those upright lines," "those curves, angles, dots," shapes that humans attach importance to. Yet Whitman's argument is that "words" are what make up the world and cannot simply be described by shapes or characters made on a page – he cites examples of "words" as those that "are in the ground and sea" and "in the air, they are in you." Words have a physical and spiritual presence, and in a similar theme to his other poetry, exist on the level of universal humanity. These words are not attached to language, but to the physical and spiritual worlds that can be sensed and experienced.

Whitman's next move to discredit the traditional idea of "words" is to note the inability of words to capture the essences of humanity and nature. The opening lines of "A Song of the Rolling Earth" are a trial period for description; even though Whitman is aware that the language will most likely fail, he attempts to assign it to nature and recreate it in a verbal form so that his reader can share his experience. While the reader knows that the natural world is not made of words, Whitman is attempting to establish the idea of words as writing on paper as too narrow and too confining when words, which make up poetry and in this poem, nature, should be sensed and revered. Rather than divide the world through the meanings that are found on paper and in dictionaries and divide humanity through misunderstanding of languages made of traditional words, Whitman is attempting to take the idea of "words" out of the linguistic. The reason why he chooses to call these senses or components of humanity and the world "words" is because "words" are the lifeblood of the poet and what he or she constructs his or her world of; yet the tools of the poet, Whitman argues, are not simply linguistic nor are they reserved for only those who are literate or who speak the same language.

Immediately the connection to Whitman's ideas of global exchange are evident; while incomplete and incapable of describing the true sense of nature, Whitman attempts to communicate with his audience and bring them his understanding and sensations to the best of his ability. By taking the idea of "words" away from their traditional definition and placing them in a space free of language, identity, and nationality, he has released "words" to the spiritual and global realms. To underline the importance of the insufficiency of his words, however, and to stress that this is a translation, Whitman

strips away the words to elemental and intuitive forms; "words" is used here because there is no other word for the sense Whitman wants to describe. In these lines, the references to the elemental, natural, and intuitive language of the earth hints at the idea of a global, internal language in nature and among men. Using the idea of "natural words," Whitman tries to unite disparate groups through feelings and descriptions that lie outside and above national and legal boundaries. Rather than be divided by many mutually unintelligible languages, humanity can be united by a common spiritual language composed of a new idea of "words."

The idea of words as meaning something other than their normal definition as speech constructions and having a power that exceeds the normal limits of what language is supposed to contain occurs again in Whitman's discussion of human beings:

> Human bodies are words, myriads of words,
> (In the best poems re-appears the body, man's or woman's, well-shaped, natural, gay,
> Every part able, active, receptive, without shame or the need of shame.) (7-9)

In this context, words and bodies are the same thing, and words and bodies are the basic ingredients of poems for Whitman. Whitman does not specify what nationality bodies must be, or from what place these bodies must originate in order to be words. Every place on the earth has a language, and every language attempts to describe bodies. The problem of the language's inability to fully describe bodies is a common problem for poets and societies regardless of time, location, or politics. It is both the tangible, physical human that he describes and the intangible sense of being human that words can only approximate that he is attempting to communicate. As Whitman explains, "The

workmanship of souls is by those inaudible words of the earth, / The masters know the earth's words and use them more than audible words" (15-16). With the contrast of the phrase "inaudible words" to "audible words," Whitman is making a counter-intuitive argument about language – he claims that poets and souls know a language that is not attached to verbal constructions or utterance. By arguing for a language that exists beyond man's speech, he also argues for a communal sense of understanding between poets and the souls of humans that is able to communicate on a non-verbal level. Yet, "inaudible words" seems to be insufficient terminology for this spiritual language, proving Whitman's rhetorical point about the shortcomings of words.

By showing both the power and failings of language to accomplish the tasks of full descriptions of humanity and the ability to communicate with all humans on the verbal level Whitman speaks to both the ability and failure of language to express humanity. That poets, the masters of words with a heightened sensitivity to the world and spiritual realms, are unable to communicate universal sensations to their readers proves that language is not enough to make the people of the world understand each other. This failing is not only that of the English language, but of all languages and the inexpressibility of humanity is common to all people and all poets. Language will always fail to fully explain, express, and glorify the beauty of humans, nature, and the earth. The earth has amazing potential and beauty, yet explanations can only be approximations:

> The earth does not withhold; it is generous enough,
> The truths of the earth continually wait, they are not so conceal'd either,
> They are calm, subtle, untransmissible by print,
> They are imbued through all things conveying themselves willingly,

Conveying a sentiment and invitation I utter and utter,
I speak not, yet if you hear me not of what avail am I to you?
To bear, to better, lacking these of what avail am I? (21-27)

The poet is faced with a problem that forces him to think outside of his linguistic capacities in order to attempt to reach his audience. The earth offers humanity and Whitman so much, and yet all of these elements are ever fully expressible in words. Their spiritual elements help to communicate them, but the poet cannot sit idly by and not help the rest of the world to understand what the earth offers humanity. The dilemma is nearly impossible to reconcile or make compromises about, yet Whitman attempts to do so, redefining "words" by erasing the traditional idea of "words" and broadening their nature and scope.

The Spirituality of Common Humanity

By omitting identifying details and characteristics that would tie the poem to locations that have been "defined" and are associated with other man-made structures when he describes the earth, Whitman offers all bodies from all places their chance to be the words of poets. All bodies have equal opportunities to inspire Whitman and other poets, and all bodies' beauty will only roughly translate into language. Despite all that divides humanity, humans, nature, and place all are equally subject to the same poetic problem. To take this further, the beauty of a people who make up a nation will be described by poets in words, and while these words will fall short and the poetry will only be an approximation of the true greatness of the people, the expression of it in the words of poets will help others globally to understand the nation and each other. The poet who understands that his words fall short in their descriptive power is the true poet because he can connect with both the verbal and spiritual and attempts to extend this

connection to his reader. Whitman's "great poets" must be able to translate spirituality and humanity to his or her audience, regardless of time or place.

Taken even further, the nation itself could be the body the poet describes; America, like any other person, is composed of many different parts. As a potential global microcosm, America is known for its diversity of nature, places, and people. The physical features of America are not uniform and neither are its people. In the Preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass,* Whitman advances the idea of the United States as a poem: "The Americans of all nations at any time upon earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem" (616). Whitman claims in this statement that "American" is a timeless and transcendent concept and identity and that "Americans" existed before the settlement and establishment of the United States. The "rondure of the world at last accomplish'd" in "Passage to India" appears to be the fulfillment of a larger, spiritual plan that lead to the settlement and establishment of the American nation as history moved towards this point in time and around the globe (80). "American" in this sense is not a political or locational identity, but more of a sensibility and spirituality. If America is simply a fulfillment of the world's destiny, then all the people of the world are a part of this community. While Whitman observes in his poetry that the embodiment of "Americans" can be seen in the diverse people of the United States, their physical presence in this territory was not a prerequisite to their "Americanness." This opens up the possibility that the borders and walls between political Americans and spiritual Americans can be erased and transcended – if America is a global microcosm, then this

microcosm can refer to the macrocosm and invite all people to be members of this community. Anyone anywhere can be an "American" through Whitman's poetry and words and through the connection to his spirit and his poetry. Much in the same manner that traditional "words" in "A Song of the Rolling Earth" must describe their own shortcomings as well as stand in for physical and spiritual sensibilities, "American" becomes the best word for Whitman's description of the nationality and community he is attempting to describe and create in his poetry.

This idea of the transcendent quality of an American identity that is not tied to a place or political nationality can be seen in the omission of identifying details in "A Song of the Rolling Earth." Whitman makes his own expression of Manifest Destiny in this poem and demonstrates his excitement for world-wide expansion of American nationality and spirit through the recognition that the world and its people are fluid beings. The earth is in constant motion:

> Tumbling on steadily, nothing dreading,
> Sunshine, storm, cold, heat, forever withstanding, passing, carrying,
> The soul's realization and determination still inheriting,
> The fluid vacuum around and ahead still entering and dividing,
> No balk retarding, no anchor anchoring, on no rock striking,
> Swift, glad, content, unbereav'd, nothing losing,
> Of all able and ready at any time to give strict account,
> The divine ship sails the divine sea. (65-72)

The earth is unafraid and unimpeded in its journey to gain and develop itself. In the same way Whitman discourages stasis in his poems and poetry, so does the earth and she constantly "sails the divine sea." This movement of the earth is not controlled by individuals or individual nations – everything and everyone moves collectively towards the destiny of the world. He does not tie the bodies and humans he describes to an

American identity, nor does he tie them to any other county's, yet the senses of togetherness, coordinated movement, and common humanity speak to Whitman's idea of being an both an American and a citizen of the world.

Americanness, in Whitman's eyes, is achieved through spirituality and common human goals, not through political divisions or dealings that tie one person to a place, government or country. As he says later in "A Song of the Rolling Earth,"

> I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate those of the earth,
> There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate the theory of the earth,
> No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account, unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth,
> Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude of the earth. (92-95)

The earth, according to Whitman, is the most powerful entity of human, natural, and spiritual life. Man can only succeed in loosely approximating the power of the earth. The earth is cast here as a benign entity which man divides according to his wishes and envy of the earth's power. As humans are the inhabitants of earth, they strive to make the earth better and Whitman constantly argues that this must be a collective action on the part of the people of the earth. Ernest Lee Tuveson, describes one way of viewing the idea of Manifest Destiny in Whitman's era as: "The real significance of the emergence of the new people is that they represent a new and vital spirit; it is not the empire they are to create, the final achievement of their work, but the very fact of their strenuous lives that is important" (129). Whitman's America is not about economic growth but about energy, spirit, and connectedness which is what allows America to become a microcosm of the world. America contains people that reflect the global

population and also generates a special energy and spirituality from this mixing. Whitman's America is about understanding and respecting the ultimate power of the earth above all and uniting under the common citizenship of the earth. By not naming people and places in "A Song of the Rolling Earth," Whitman aligns himself with an ideology that is excited by the humanity and life of the people of the world and the creation of an American spirit that properly channels their energies in the increasingly modern and global world.

A Poet Not Made of Words Alone

As in "Salut au Monde!," the channel through which Whitman sees energy flowing is "Walt Whitman." The speaker of the poem does not identify himself as "Walt Whitman," yet the reader is expected to intuit his role based on the other works of *Leaves of Grass*; "Walt Whitman" is so frequently a presence in Whitman's poems that the reader becomes conditioned to assume that all speakers and poets in *Leaves of Grass* are named "Walt Whitman." As in "Salut au Monde!" and other poems where Whitman makes the intimate connections between his audience and himself across great distances that is highlighted by Coviello, in Whitman's global and American sensibilities, one is expected to know the voices of one's intimates and each other as the community and the energy is exchanged around the globe. In the early lines of "A Song of the Rolling Earth," Whitman places himself at the forefront of bodies as words as well as undermines the value of his own name:

> Air, soil, water, fire – those are words,
> I myself am a word with them – my qualities interpenetrate with theirs – my name is nothing to them,
> Though it were told in the three thousand languages, what would air, soil, water, fire, know of my name? (10-12)

These lines note that the speaker has a name, but he refrains from speaking it because he knows that it will never fully describe him. The name exists to identify the speaker but it is unimportant in comparison to his humanity and membership in a sort of global relationship. To identify himself would be to divide his audience by bringing their prejudices about words and names into the dialogue and give them information about who and where he is that could influence their judgment of him. He keeps this potentially divisive language from his audience because these terms do not matter in terms of global humanity. What is most important to Whitman's speaker is that he is a human being and so is his reader, not that his name is American or implies certain descent. This avoidance of his name also prohibits those who challenge his authority to speak about the earth from his perspective not to tie him to a place, a set of experiences, or a history. He is free from the connotations and connections a name may create for a person through its nature. The speaker's name is merely a word, and it, like all other words, fails to fully encompass and describe who or what he is.

Of course, when discussing the shortcomings of words and names and how they limit one to an incomplete description Whitman manages to make the speaker's relationship to his name exceedingly complex. While the speaker refuses to name himself in "A Song of the Rolling Earth," the speaker acknowledges "I myself am a word with them – my qualities interpenetrate with theirs – my name is nothing with them" drawing attention to the idea that there is a word, or a name, for him (11). He could be identified and brought forward as an individual at any point. This information in the poetry almost serves as a threat that at any point divisions and boundaries may be

re-established, but that this current freedom is within human control. Whitman is making a double move in these lines; he positions himself as both an individual word and one of the masses or larger vocabulary of humanity. In this instance, Whitman's speaker, whom we assume to be Whitman himself, uses his physicality as an example – because he is a human being with a body, he is a word like "air, soil, water, fire," a natural, elemental being (10). According to Whitman's contemporary E. P. Mitchell, "His sympathy with the external world is genuine; his heart beats in true accord with the heart of nature" ("Walt Whitman and the Poetry of the Future"). To demonstrate this sympathy with the world Whitman must place himself in the position of representative man whose body is one of nature's "words." He is not responsible to a man-made nation, but is a part of a larger, natural dynamic that does not care about such divisive matters. In a sense, he is transcendent and more spiritual than the politics and laws of man.

Since words do not mean verbal language in this context for Whitman – because words cannot fully describe the essence of people, places, or nature – the name an actual language bestows on any natural being or entity means nothing to the elements and components of nature. To use only one language, one set of words and their rules, excludes the majority of the inhabitants of the earth and privileges the few who are able to understand and manipulate it. Man-made language made of traditional words cannot connect the people of the earth. Languages are approximations, attempts by man and the less spiritual to pin down and catalog the parts of the world. Because it is not universally understandable and has rules that are individual to a culture that governs its

usage, language divides nature, man, and the nation through the use of terminology and definition and prohibits free experience and exchange between all parts of the world. Language, its uses, misuses, and prejudices, remain intimately tied to a nation's culture and cannot be released into a fluid and universal context. Understanding between humans is thought to be impaired by a language barrier that exists only because of the privileging of language and words when true human interaction and feeling exists on an inexpressible plane.

Expanded into his ideas of Americanism, humanity, and globalism, Whitman is not privileging one language over another; instead, he is stating that no language in the world can supersede or correctly translate the international language of nature. Every language is equally insufficient and divisive because it claims to describe humanity and the experience of being human. These descriptions, however, are substitutes for the actual experiences that could connect all humans on a non-verbal level. Because language is culturally subjective and a tool that is available to all, there is not one language out of three thousand on the planet that is most correct or that states Whitman's case most concisely. People rely on words and languages because they are common cultural constructs; what Whitman argues for in "A Song of the Rolling Earth" is that humans attempt to erase what divides them and forge the human connections his poetry envisions in order to create a global community.

In the second section of "A Song of the Rolling Earth" Whitman resumes his call to "Whoever you are!" that he began in "Salut au Monde!"[11] In two vastly different poems, the reader is called upon by the speaker/poet in remarkably similar ways, giving evidence that the poems and their arguments are not as dissimilar as they appear on the surface. To break the fourth wall again and later in *Leaves of Grass* seems to be a continuation of a dialogue, a sustaining of the connection between speaker and reader, and a reminder that the reader has a responsibility within the dynamic created by the poetry. As in "Salut au Monde!," the address is universal and Whitman speaks to all members of the global population:

> Whoever you are! you are he or she for whom the earth is solid and
> liquid,
> You are he or she for whom the sun and moon hang in the sky,
> For none more than you are the present and the past,
> For none more than you is immortality. (75-78)

Like "Salut au Monde!," Whitman's speaker in "A Song of the Rolling Earth," neither identifies nor qualifies his addressee and justifies the existence of all who read his poetry and inhabit the planet. "The divine ship sails the divine sea for you" (74) in Whitman's poetry, making sure that the unidentified "whoever you are" knows that the continuous motion of the earth is intended for him or her and for all readers of the poem. Whitman is clear that this "whoever you are" has a legacy on the earth: "Each man to himself and each woman to herself is the word of the past and present, and the true word of immortality; / No one can acquire for another – not one, / No one can grow for another

[11] Interestingly, these two poems seem to bracket *Leaves of Grass*, with the international "Salut au Monde!" appearing early in the text and "A Song of the Rolling Earth" included among the final poems of the book in the 1892-1892 edition.

– not one" (79-81). Whitman establishes both individuality and collectivism in these lines – each human's growth and legacy on earth is his or her own, yet each human is entitled to an equal part of this process and an equal share of the earth.

The difference between "A Song of the Rolling Earth" and "Salut au Monde!" is that in "Salut au Monde!" Walt Whitman makes this address to the world amid the naming of various peoples and places while in "A Song of the Rolling Earth," he makes his general address amid the general anonymity of the world's people. More simply put, the difference lies in creating a global citizenship based on common ownership and access to all the named parts of the Earth in addition to creating a global community that is based solely on an understanding of common spirituality and humanity. While both poems strive towards a borderless global community, "Salut au Monde!" calls to specific parts and people of the earth to come together, while "A Song of the Rolling Earth" asks the people of the earth to realize that they are all members of the same planet above all else.

What is interesting is that what remains unnamed in "Salut au Monde!" is named in "A Song of the Rolling Earth." In both poems, Whitman justifies human existence and his vision of humanity and supernatural and spiritual terms – people should come together as a community because they are spiritual beings with a common sense of humanity. Yet in "Salut au Monde!" Whitman does not specifically name this force or purpose, while in "A Song of the Rolling Earth" Whitman uses the imagery of nature and the purpose of the earth to make the same poetic argument. This could again be described by the decision to name and not to name in both poems; when people and

places are named in "Salut au Monde!," the spirituality that allows for common humanity and exchange is not, while when things are left unnamed he is allowed the leeway to imply and sense the enabling spiritual sensibility. In a way, the poems compliment and complete each other through their named and unnamed elements. By stating that humans have a purpose or right to be on the planet and to enjoy all that earth has to offer, Whitman makes the differences among people seem unimportant and the words that divide them (or that they use to divide themselves) insufficient as barrier-creators. This idea echoes throughout "A Song of the Rolling Earth," in which there are no names of people or places for readers to divide themselves among or identify with instead of identifying with each other as humans. By not allowing the readers to factionalize along national and linguistic lines, Whitman creates among the members of the world's population a common sense of entitlement to the bounty and beauty of the rolling earth and senses of global community and humanity.

Whitman continues on the theme of global commonality and then makes a series of promises to the people of the earth about the greatness of the earth, nature, and its people, especially if they are able to recognize their common humanity and share equally in Whitman's poetic universe. In the third section of "A Song of the Rolling Earth," the speaker "swears" to his reader what both he and they will experience if they surrender themselves to being part of earth's community. As for himself, "I swear I see what is better than to tell the best, / It is always to leave the best untold" (102-103), reinforcing his idea that no one can really ever fully "tell" the best anyway because it must be experienced and witnessed. He continues this reinforcement of his larger, global point

by returning to the idea that words are insufficient for telling and understanding the true story of the human race and all the goods that the world has to offer:

> The best of the earth cannot be told anyhow, all or any is best,
> It is not what you anticipated, it is cheaper, easier, nearer,
> Things are not dismiss'd from the places they held before,
> The earth is not as positive and direct as it was before,
> Facts, religions, improvements, politics, trades, are as real as before,
> But the soul is also real, it too is positive and direct,
> No reasoning, no proof has establish'd it,
> Undeniable growth has establish'd it. (108-115)

In these lines, Whitman acknowledges the shortcomings of his poetry and human powers of expression to capture the true essence of the earth. It is only through experience and openness to and awareness of change that the earth can be understood and enjoyed. Human institutions are a fact of the modern human experience, but so is the soul and humanity. People cannot fully divide themselves from one another as long as they remember that they have selves and souls. It is a connection between the human soul and nature that leads to true understanding and experience. What is also in these lines is an awareness that the earth, the world, and humanity are changing, and that this change is beyond words but must be understood. The old words and definitions do not hold any longer, but in order to keep up with the changes and maintain a good sense of common humanity, everyone, everywhere must be open to a spiritual, flexible, global experience.

A Call to Humanity

Although it is simple to understand and intuit all that is good in the earth, it is difficult to make accurate verbal sense of the situation. Poets such as Whitman and those he foresees following his tradition are crafters of language with the insufficient tools of words; as such, they are able to call humanity to action and describe the changes

to the best of their ability. The earth has changed in some way as it progresses towards the future, and Whitman acknowledges that there are institutions that must be dealt with and navigated by humans; political and national structures that impede human relations and infringe on nature are parts of life and necessary elements of human and modern progress. These structures, after all, were instrumental in making the people of the earth aware of one another and creating the conditions under which they could experience one another. Yet the boundaries between the nations exist. Whitman's poetry argues, however, that all humans have souls that are just as valuable as those institutions that separate groups of people and nations through their structures, rules, and prejudices. "A Song of the Rolling Earth" the speaker confidently argues, "I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate those of the earth;" all forces on the earth are simply derivatives and imitators of natural and spiritual forces (92). Human progress creates and affirms the validity and reality of the growth of the human soul, which Whitman celebrates as necessary to the growth of the American and global dynamics.

Although not always self-identified in his poetry, Whitman maintains the views that America is the site of new hope for human civilization and for the birth of new, global society. Whitman was aware of the gathering of the global population on American soil and that the increasing mobility of the world's people: "The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to commensurate with a people. To him the other continents arrive as contributions...he gives them reception for their sake and for his own sake" (Whitman 618).[12] America as

[12] Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 Whitman, Walt. *Leaves and Grass and Other Writings*. Ed. Michael

both the idea that existed before the establishment of the nation and as a global microcosm has the chance to be realized and actualized by the American people of Whitman's era and the future.

In accordance with the commands of his poetry for Americans and the people of the earth to view and experience the world, Whitman follows his own advice and brings his observations into his poetry to help shape his poetic argument. As Whitman has observed and named the trends of his age and he has been able to recognize the Americans are at a historical moment that allows them to step forward on the global stage. Whitman feels that he is the poet most capable of drawing everyone's attention to these developments and their destiny because "The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is" (623).[13] Because Whitman is an "average" member of society who is equally tapped into both the spirits of everyday life and common humanity, he is the "great poet" who understands his present, past, and future from his day-to-day experiences.

Whitman uses the increasingly globally representative America to create a new space for the nation and his readers in his poetry because "The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself and makes one" (625).[14] The old forms, "words," and languages cannot describe this new America and new world, and Whitman calls for his poetry and Americans to break new ground. In a self-review of the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* entitled "Walt Whitman and His Poems," Whitman offers the rationale

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Moon. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002.

[13] Ibid

[14] Ibid

for that argument that he is the poet who will give birth to the American literary tradition that will accurately represent all of its society's members for the world and for history:

> He must re-create poetry with the elements always at hand. He must imbue it with himself as he is, disorderly, fleshy, and sensual, a lover of things, yet a lover of men and women above the whole of the other objects of the universe. His work is to be achieved by unusual methods. Neither classic or romantic is he, nor a materialist any more than a spiritualist...But in their stead pour vast and fluid the fresh mentality of this mighty age, and the realities of this mighty continent, and the sciences and inventions and discoveries of the present world. ("Walt Whitman and His Poems")

By taking an expansive view of the country which also allows him to view the world, Whitman seeks to define this new body of American literature and places his poetic voice as the first call to the global microcosm of the United States. As it is sung in a new, spiritual voice that seeks to re-define and refine the old means of seeing and speaking to the world, this nation is not one bound by poetic rules and convention; has an internalized sense of poetry and expresses it through its existence. In line with Whitman's sense of a unifying human spirituality that will unite the people of the world, Whitman calls through his poetry to "whoever you are" for a nation that includes and celebrates the global population. This nation is made in the fresh, clean space of poetry because it is in this medium that the microcosm that represents the international community can have full communication and spiritual connection with the world.

In Whitman's poetry and commentary on his work he is insistent that the poet of American literature must be bold and step forward out of the masses of people. The poet must be a part of a society, but it must be a society of diverse individuals. The identity of the poet who can speak for America is one who has internalized the diversity of the

nation and sees its potential to forge intimate connections between Old Worlds and New Worlds. If the poet does not operate at this spiritual and global level as a national poet, he or she loses the ability to understand and experience America and loses his or her insight to the people of the world. As America is composed of a gathered mass of individuals from various places and cultures there are no predetermined criteria for the poet who will write the "song" of American life other than his or her spiritual and poetic abilities to understand the national and the global.

To speak for the nation and the world requires a strong sense of self and a strong poetic voice in addition to one's ability to celebrate and experience the diversity of America. Because Americans are so varied and individual means that the speaker for the nation must firmly assert his or her identity. He or she must be willing to challenge the gathered and diverse masses and claim to know and understand all on the basis of common humanity. Through the use of his own name and his own persona as his main character, Whitman is able to validate his reasoning for why he gets to speak for America: "Where is the huge composite of all other nations, cast in a fresher and brawnier matrix, passing adolescence, and needed this day, live and arrogant, to lead the marches of the world?" ("Walt Whitman and His Poems"). According to Whitman, the rough, regular American must speak for the nation because of the uniqueness of its character. It is the bold, "arrogant" American that must step forward and become the voice of such a varied and people because he most openly owns his Americanness, his diversity, and his personal globalism. "Walt Whitman" in *Leaves of Grass* is that loud voice that speaks for America and the world through no other means than his pure,

unbridled desire to be heard and his sheer enthusiasm for the people he sees, experiences, and claims to understand on a spiritual level. Whitman's poetry makes it clear that this mission must be carried out by a poet who is aware of the freedom of his person and unashamed to assert that freedom to the world in order to encourage them to embrace it themselves.

Often characterized as an egotistical move to place oneself at the center of one's own poetic universe, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* seems to assert the necessity of doing so in the creation of a representative American literature that speaks to both the inhabitants of the New World as well as those to whom they are tied in the Old World. In fact, Whitman acknowledges his own egotism and counters claims to his arrogance in another anonymous self-review when he states: "What good is it to argue about egotism? There can be no two thoughts on Walt Whitman's egotism. That is what he steps out of the crowd and turns and faces them for" ("Walt Whitman, a Brooklyn Boy."). And it is the poet who has the authority and the courage to step forward and do so and be heard, not only by his own people, but by the people of the world. As the world becomes more interconnected through immigration, history, and technology, the poet must create an artifact that can transcend these divisions and "turn and face them."

Through Walt Whitman's world view and strong personality, he becomes the voice for America both at home and internationally because he chooses to assert his individuality over all things and people. He is able to do this because the assertion of individuality does not neglect the larger community from which he speaks; he is a representative of a larger group who asserts who he is and who the other members of his

nation are. By asserting that he is aware of their identities, he also asserts that he is aware of their connections; by addressing the world, he demonstrates that he knows the borders of America are not rigid and closed because the physical make-up of America proves that there is a world outside of America. In relation to the development of American literature, nationality, and identity, contemporary Whitman critic Edward Dowden states:

> ...before a nation can become poetical to itself, consciously or unconsciously, it must possess a distinctive character, and the growth of the national as of individual character is a process of long duration in every case, of longer duration than ordinary when a larger than ordinary variety of the elements of character wait to be assimilated and brought into harmony. (Dowden)

To write the American "poem," Whitman must assert his character and absorb all that is possible into his person, and attempt to speak for all within the lines of *Leaves of Grass.* By writing the "American poem," Whitman writes the "global poem" through the recognition of America's nature as a global society in his work. Using America as a microcosm of the global macrocosm, Whitman's poetry works to include the world within an even smaller frame. The complex issue of naming and un-naming the characters in his speakers in his verse leave Whitman and America ambiguous as both search for a definitive identity. The fluidity of the earth, its words, and its people makes it hard to define and place limits upon, erasing its borders and constructions until all that remains is universal humanity. As America is varied and vast, so is the poet who attempts to describe its landscape, people, and experience. Through reaching out and naming the people of the world, Whitman includes everyone on the globe in his poetry, attempting to show a general affection for all of humanity. Whether the words he uses to

describe the world and its people empowers or limits the people of the world is debatable. This issue becomes even more debatable when the names of people and places are left out and Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* becomes a general celebration of humanity and the condition of living. Regardless of the effects of his attempts to be all-encompassing, Whitman looks to the world and America in *Leaves of Grass* and attempts to speak for all in one steady, resonant voice.

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Biography

Elizabeth Wiggins had the good sense to be born after sunrise in September, 1981, in Livingston, New Jersey. During her K-8 career in the New Jersey public school system Ms. Wiggins was the proud recipient of Bush and Clinton-era Presidential Academic Fitness Awards, at least two awards for Good Citizenship, and one Kawameeh Chief Award which is featured prominently at her parents' home in central New Jersey. After a much acclaimed high school graduation, Ms. Wiggins attended The College of New Jersey and graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2003. Ms. Wiggins did a brief stint in an office in Manhattan before returning to the academic world of Lehigh University in 2004. She now spends her days in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

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